



Amah Mutsun Tribal Band of Costanoan/Ohlone Indians

*Historically known as "San Juan Bautista Band and San Juan Band" Indians of California*

September , 2015

PO Box 5272 | Galt, CA 95622

His Holiness Pope Francis  
Casa de Marta  
Vatican City Rome  
00120  
Italy

Re: Open Letter in Opposition to the Canonization of Fr. Junipero Serra

My name is Valentin Lopez and I am the Chairman of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band. Our Tribe is comprised of the documented descendants of the indigenous peoples taken to missions San Juan Bautista and Santa Cruz along the central coast of California. This is our Tribe's sixth letter to Your Holiness. Our previous letters are available at: [www.amahmutsun.org](http://www.amahmutsun.org).

This letter serves to document the many reasons for our opposition to the canonization of Serra. Serra was the architect of the mission system; he developed the brutal inhumane policies that had no regard for our ancestors. Our letters presented the reasons for opposing the canonization of Serra. We also requested a meeting with Your Holiness prior to the end of July so that we could share our knowledge and oral history of Junipero Serra, the California mission system and the continuing impact of our historic trauma that continues within our Tribe today.

Undoubtedly what puzzles and hurts us the most is how the Catholic Church has ignored the humanity of our ancestors. The Catholic Church has never truthfully acknowledged the tragic destruction that the mission system caused to the indigenous peoples of California nor has it ever acknowledged its role in these atrocities. In fact, the Church has taken extraordinary measures to cover up the inhumanity with which Serra and the Church treated our ancestors. An elder member recently recalled that a priest told her in the 1950's to "suffer in silence." She did and continues to suffer to this day.

On September 23rd Your Holiness will canonize Serra. The ceremony will confirm the Church's misguided belief that Serra led a saintly life. The act will also demonstrate that the Catholic Church has no regard for the humanity of our ancestors. Serra's canonization will tell the world that the mission system developed by Serra was holy and sacred. What the world will not be told is that the brutal methods and policies developed by Serra terrorized our ancestors. This terror included the violent capture, enslavement, torture, and rape of natives as well as an unhealthy diet and squalid living quarters that resulted in the death of an estimated 150,000 California Indians at the missions. This number includes thousands of women and children who died from syphilis and gonorrhea as a result of their sexual abuse. How the Catholic Church and you, Holy Father, can consider Serra's actions to be holy, sacred or saintly is incomprehensible to our Tribe.

The total disregard of the humanity of our ancestors continues to this day. Each year millions of visitors tour the California missions. On these tours docents say very little, if anything, of the Indians who were forced to build the missions and who were confined in them. When visitors ask about the Indians they are told that natives came voluntarily to the missions and that the priests treated the Indians as "children," implying that they were well-fed and care for. The opposite is true. While initially Indians were curious and came to the missions, they were not told that being baptized meant that they would thereafter be involuntarily confined at the missions and forced to labor for clergy and soldiers for life. As word of the brutality and inadequate rations at the missions became widespread, Indians ran when they saw soldiers coming yet many were captured anyway and brought to the missions to replace the thousands who had perished there. The insidious analogy to "children" also fails to explain that while "children" grow up and obtain adult rights, Indians at the missions were never accorded the rights of Spanish citizenship, even though they were theoretically supposed to attain these after 10 years.

For many decades, California missions have told visitors that Father Serra brought God to the Indians, the missions taught agriculture to the Indians. These lies ignore the humanity of our ancestors prior to contact. Visitors are not told that California Indians successfully lived on their lands for over 12,000 years and nearly 1,000+ generations. Tribes had formal governments, religious beliefs and economic practices that included critical knowledge regarding how to care for the environment and successfully manage animals and plant life to ensure it provided an abundance of diverse resources for members. All of these life ways were intentionally destroyed by Serra and the mission system who believed that if he destroyed our culture, we would have no choice but to accept the Catholic faith and become citizens of Spain. The destruction of California tribes has never been acknowledged or truthfully documented by the Church, the State of California or the federal government. It is unconscionable that the missions are looked at as places of love, honor, respect and pride, given that the documented facts indicate the polar opposite.

Our Amah Mutsun Tribe cannot understand how the Catholic Church can issue general apologies for wrongs committed against indigenous peoples while failing to acknowledge the Church's actions in California during the mission period. We believe that a sincere apology must be like a confession. If a person went to Catholic confession and told the priest, "I'm sorry for my sins," the priest would never accept this as a sincere confession (apology). The priest would want to know exactly what sins were committed, how often and why. This must be the standard for a sincere and legitimate apology from the Church for what it did to California Indians.

In 2000, Pope John Paul II seemed to apologize to indigenous peoples when he said that he "begged forgiveness for the sins of the sons and daughters of the church." He also stated that, "Whenever the truth has been suppressed by governments and their agencies or even by Christian Governments, the wrongs done to the indigenous peoples have to be honestly acknowledged...The past cannot be undone, but honest recognition of past injustices can lead to measures and attitudes that will help to rectify the damaging effects for both the indigenous community and the wider society." While Pope John Paul II appeared to offer an apology to indigenous people, in fact he referred very narrowly to "Christian Governments." The Catholic Church itself did not apologize or acknowledge any fault or culpability. Unsurprisingly, in the 15 years since, the Catholic Church has taken no tangible steps to accept responsibility for its sins against indigenous peoples.

On December 22nd, Bishop Garcia of the Monterey Diocese offered a mass of reconciliation where he apologized to the members of our Amah Mutsun Tribe. During the mass Bishop Garcia expressed the Church's "desire for a new relationship that promotes common spiritual growth, honesty, mutual respect, and a desire to forgive and be forgiven for past wrongs." This mass was very emotional for our members. I can remember looking at our tribal elders as Bishop Garcia read the apology and seeing tears rolling down their cheeks. I also remember wishing my mother were alive to witness this mass. This was the first time the Catholic Church had ever acknowledged the humanity of our Mutsun ancestors.

Prior to the mass, our Tribal Council met and agreed that we would "acknowledge" the apology rather than "accept" the apology because we felt it was important for the Church to show their sincerity with actions and not just words. We looked forward to the day we could accept Bishop Garcia's apology with no reservations. Also, prior to the mass, we met with Bishop Garcia and requested that we be invited to a meeting with all priests of the Monterey Diocese so we could tell them of our tribal history at the missions. Bishop Garcia agreed to schedule this meeting, yet when the time came, he called to tell me he was going to postpone this meeting. The meeting has never been rescheduled. We continue to wait. Another request we made was for a small room in the mission museum to be dedicated to our Mutsun history and that we be given authority to present the content of the mission as we wanted. Bishop Garcia agreed, but to date this request has not been fulfilled.

On June 18th, 2015, Your Holiness issued the Catholic Church's Encyclical on the Environment. The Encyclical Letter states that "to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation ... is a sin..." The letter also says that we must "recognize our errors, sins, faults and failures...[and] we must examine our lives and acknowledge the ways in which we have harmed God's **creations** though our actions and our failure to act (added emphasis)." Our Creator, who is the same as the Church's God, created California Indians; our ancestors are part of the "biological diversity"

presented in your Encyclical. Therefore, the destruction of the indigenous peoples of California, their culture and their environment by Junipero Serra and the California mission system he established can only be recognized as a sin. Or does the Catholic Church believe God did not create the indigenous people of California?

On July 9th, 2015, Your Holiness apologized for the Church's sins, "Many grave sins were committed against the native people of America in the name of God...I humbly ask forgiveness, not only for the offense of the Church herself, but also for crimes committed against the native peoples during the so-called conquest of America." This is an important and strongly worded apology. It appears to apply to all indigenous peoples of the Americas, including Indians in California. However, the Church cannot on the one hand apologize for committing grave sins against all indigenous people of the Americas and then on the other hand, confer sainthood on the principle perpetrator of those grave sins in California. Doing so renders the apology insincere and disingenuous.

Our Tribe recently reflected on the concept of "moral authority." Specifically, we asked what is moral authority, where does it come from and did Junipero Serra have the moral authority to capture, enslave, whip, torture and dominate our ancestors? After a lot of discussions and reading on this topic we concluded that moral authority, in this case, is the authority given by Creator to do what is right. Based on this definition we asked ourselves did Serra or the Catholic Church have the moral authority to dominate our ancestors, destroying their culture and environment? In a recent speech in Bolivia Your Holiness said that the destruction of peoples, cultures and environments is a sin. Therefore, Serra and the Catholic Church could not have acted with moral authority when they destroyed our culture and environment or dominated our ancestors. Furthermore, Serra and the Church did not act with moral authority when they stole our indigenous lands and violated the Eighth Commandment, "Thou shall not steal." How did the Church obtain the moral authority to violate God's Eighth Commandment?

There can be no doubt that the purported authority to conquer and dominate California Indians comes from the papal bulls that pertain to indigenous peoples and were issued by popes in the latter 1400's and early 1500's. These bulls promoted the capture, colonization, domination, and exploitation of non-Christian nations. The bulls considered non-Christians to be the "enemies of Christ" and directed (that is, gave "authority" to) the Church to partner with Spain and Portugal to put indigenous peoples into "perpetual slavery and to take all their possessions and their property." It saddens us to think that when our ancestors first encountered the priests and Spaniards, our ancestors did not know they were considered to be the enemies of Christ (or the Church). Our ancestors did not consider the foreigners to be their enemies and initially helped them. The papal bulls do not represent moral authority; the bulls only represented greed and evil. It is shocking to know that these papal bulls are still in effect. We continue to denounce them and once again call on you to rescind them.

Earlier this year, our Tribal psychiatrist and I had a meeting with Bishop Francis Quinn, Retired, Sacramento. Our conversation was regarding Serra and his treatment of California Indians. Bishop Quinn said Serra was not following the teachings of Christ. He added that the story of the Samaritans tells us how the Church should evangelize. I read the story of the Samaritans and was struck by two passages. The first one states that "The Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them." In the Bible, Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan and after which he says, "Go and do thou also in like manner." Jesus provided both the path and the moral authority for both the Church and Serra to follow. There can be no denying that both the Church and Serra abandoned Christ's path.

The Amah Mutsun find it ironic that Serra belonged to the Franciscan Order of Priests. This Order is named after St. Francis of Assisi. We also find it ironic, Holy Father, that Your Holiness took his namesake when Your Holiness was elected Pope. St. Francis provides the perfect example of how the Church should evangelize. St. Francis treated every person he met, especially the poorest of the poor, with charity and respect. St. Francis knew he had to use both words and deeds because that is what Jesus did. St. Francis did not force his ideas on anyone nor did he enslave people for the sake of evangelization. Furthermore, he did not steal their land. If Serra had learned the lessons of St. Francis, he would have learned to evangelize with charity, humility, kind words and good deeds, if the Church considers Serra's evangelizing to have been a success, then why do our people continue to suffer so immensely from our historic trauma to this day?

Serra's and the Church's failure to learn from the teaching of Christ or from the life of St. Francis resulted in the complete extinction of many, many California tribes and great devastation for many others. In Mission San Juan Bautista, which opened in 1797, the priest reported in 1823, that 19,421 Indians died at the mission. This mission continued its violent practices for another ten years. Also in San Juan Bautista mission records show that 84 or more indigenous tribes were taken to this mission. The vast majority of these tribes did not survive the mission era. Lost were all of the children, mothers, fathers, and grandparents of these tribes. Lost were their oral histories, indigenous knowledge, their prayers, songs and ceremonies, knowledge of how to take care of Mother Earth, member's individual sense of self-worth, and so much more.

Recently our Tribe hosted and attended many days of ceremonies and prayer with our native brothers and sisters throughout California. At these gatherings we shared stories of truth regarding our tribal histories. Many of these stories recounted horrendous events and conditions during missions times. These stories are difficult to tell and difficult to listen to but they must be told because they are the truth. Our gatherings were held in the hope that both our Creator and you Holy Father will hear our prayers and the truth about the mission system and reverse your decision to canonize Serra.

We would like to know why the Catholic Church has waived two important criteria for the canonization of Junipero Serra. Waiving these criteria gives the clear message that the established Church criteria are arbitrary and may be capriciously altered or interpreted as desired by church leaders to fit their agenda. Specifically, the Church has waived the requirement for two miracles and, secondly, the church has dropped the requirement for a "Devil's Advocate."

On June 30th, our Tribe held a meeting with Bishop Quinn, Sacramento (Retired), Bishop Clark, Los Angeles, and Fr. Lavaroni, Sacramento. (Bishop Garcia agreed to attend this meeting and then called the morning of the meeting to say that he was told that he did not have to attend.) We also invited Bishop Soto of the Sacramento Diocese and he responded that he was unavailable. At this meeting we talked about the miracle attributed to Serra and Father Lavaroni admitted that the miracle for Serra was "weak." The miracle attributed to Serra occurred in 1960. A nun was near death and she prayed the novena to Serra and was miraculously cured of lupus. Very recently I was talking to two elders of our Tribe about this miracle and they both said lupus is very hard to diagnose and in fact both of them had been diagnosed with lupus in recent years but it turned out the diagnosis was wrong. Basic research of this disease reveals that there are many challenges to reaching a lupus diagnosis. Lupus is known today as "the great imitator" because its symptoms mimic many other illnesses. Lupus symptoms can also be unclear, can come and go, and can change. We have no doubt that the diagnosis of lupus would have been much more difficult fifty-five years ago. We ask that the Church obtain an independent review of the medical records that led to the diagnosis of lupus by a highly qualified doctor to confirm this miracle.

We recently learned that a Devil's Advocate regarding Serra was initially appointed to research the life of Serra in the late 1930's or early 1940's. The role of the Devil's Advocate is to investigate evidence material to the canonization of Serra. Shortly after the Devil's Advocate work began, the Church waived the requirement for a Devil's Advocate. The work undertaken by the Devil's Advocate regarding Serra did not include any testimony from Native peoples or the latter's oral history.

In addition, at the June 30th meeting, we were told that you, Holy Father, will hold a thirty (30) minute meeting with nine Native American representatives in the U.S. There will be one representative from each of the missions founded by Serra. These representatives were to be picked by the bishops. Bishop Clark said he was having a hard time identifying native persons who wanted to attend. He said that only persons who agree with the canonization of Serra were being asked to attend. This meeting represents nothing more than a photo opportunity for the Church. If the Church intended this to be a meaningful meeting with California Indians, this meeting would have been held with legitimate tribal leaders who represent historic tribal governments. A legitimate meeting would be scheduled for more than 30 minutes and the meeting would be recognized as a government-to-government meeting. The tribes themselves would choose their respective representatives. However, as it now stands, the Church is adding insult to injury by failing to recognize the authority of tribes to choose their own representatives.

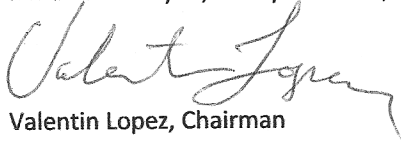
Anyone who attends the meeting with Your Holiness cannot speak for their tribe or anyone else; they only speak for themselves.

You've been quoted as saying, "Facts are more important than ideas." There can be no doubt that the basis of Serra's canonization is based on the idea that Serra led a saintly life. When the Church says, "Serra was a man of his time," "No one is perfect," "Serra didn't intend for that to happen," or that "Serra protected the Indians," these are unsubstantiated ideas being promoted by a select few proponents of Serra's canonization. However, when one reviews the facts of the brutal mission system created by Serra, it is incongruous for anyone to think that a person who was responsible for such suffering and death could be considered saintly.

In an article in Indian Country Today ([www.indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com](http://www.indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com)), Serra-gate: The Fabrication of a Saint, Dr. Christine Grabowski, writes about the often touted Indian Bill of Rights that was written by Serra in 1773. She asks, "Why do Catholic websites, publications and spokespersons fail to identify the "Representación" [Indian Bill of Rights] accurately and explain its provisions in detail? Perhaps it is so their audience will not notice that the 32 points are not "rights" for Indians. Serra did not travel to Mexico City to defend Indian rights or submit a document that anyone identified as an "Indian Bill of Rights" or a document that could legitimately be "termed" one. Catholic sources have shamelessly created a fabrication in an effort to make it seem as if Serra deserves canonization." As a California Indian I've heard many pro-Serra advocates talk of this Bill of Rights; and now, years later, I learn it never existed. We have no doubt that this is true of other evidence that's used to justify the canonization of Serra.

In conclusion, we would like to say that the generations of pain and suffering of our ancestors that were caused, perpetrated and covered up by the Catholic Church is equal to or worse than that of the altar boys who were molested by Catholic priests world-wide. The efforts to conceal the truth of what happened to our ancestors lasted for nearly 200 years. During these 200 years our people prayed, held ceremony and continued to carry forth the truth as best they could in the belief that someday their true story would be told. Ascencion Solarsano, our Tribal leader from the late 1800's until her death in 1930, always reminded our members that, "A lie is a lie until the truth arrives." The announcement by you, Holy Father, that Serra will be canonized makes it clear to our people that now is the time for the truth to arrive.

himah'a-ka onyen, All my relations,



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